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Let districts try single-sex schools

American Civil Liberties Union should get out of way of reform

Michigan's public schools fail one in four students who are entrusted to their care. And in large urban school districts like Detroit, the failure rate is above 50 percent.

Any idea to reduce the number of children being left behind by the current system ought to be welcomed.

Instead, Michigan's American Civil Liberties Union branch is once again hinting it will block efforts by the state Legislature to allow all-boys and all-girls schools in troubled districts.

Educators believe these single-sex schools can better focus students on their studies by removing some social distractions. Catholic schools have proved that theory for generations. The schools also recognize that boys and girls learn differently.

But the ACLU equates the idea to racial segregation and contends it violates the U.S. Constitution's equal protection clause.

The ACLU is reading the law too narrowly. Drawing school district boundaries to forcibly segregate students by race is far different from allowing parents to choose to send their children to single-sex schools.

The key difference is choice, and parents need more choices for getting a high-quality education for their children.

In the past, state school districts, including Detroit, have dropped the idea of single-sex schools out of fear of engaging in a costly legal battle with the ACLU. But state lawmakers should go ahead and authorize the schools, and districts that believe they will be helpful should set them up.

The ACLU is protecting no one here. Parents who opt for single-sex schools are not being victimized, nor are they being stripped of their civil rights.

They are making an informed choice that may lead to a much better future for their children.

They shouldn't be denied that opportunity by lawyers more concerned with winning a legal point than with the welfare of school children and their desperate parents.

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